

1202.

SILENT SUBMISSION

TO

THE WILL OF GOD.

SILENT SUNDAY



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THE WILL OF GOD

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THE WILL OF GOD.

A

FUNERAL SERMON,

Preached at Brentford, February 17th, 1793,

ON ACCOUNT OF

THE DEATH

OF

MR. WILLIAM AITON,

HIS MAJESTY'S PRINCIPAL GARDENER AT KEW,

AND PUBLISHED AT THE EARNEST REQUEST

OF A TRUE FRIEND:

LONDON:

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SMITHFIELD.

1793.

R. Smith (R)

EXHIBIT SUBMISSION

TO

THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS

OF THE MUSEUM

AND THE SECRETARY

OF THE MUSEUM

OF THE MUSEUM

OF THE MUSEUM



LONDON

SECRETARY

TO

Mr. ROBERT GRAY,

OF RICHMOND.

My Dear Sir,

HOW very rare a thing is true friendship among Men? Almost every acquaintance of the present day receives; but few, very few indeed, merit the appellation of Friend. It is however, a tribute, due to this generation, and it will give pleasure to the worthy part of it to know, that there did lately subsist, a strong and disinterested friendship,

friendship, for more than forty years. I venture to name you, and our deceased Brother, as a true, acknowledged and well-known example. To such a connection now, for the first time, interrupted, I will say broken, but not dissolved, what can be refused? For my own part, I could not reject your warm and repeated request to publish this Sermon, undertaken and preached at the desire of the amiable Family, who are most deeply interested in the late melancholy event. If, through the blessing of God, the reading of it shall prove in any measure beneficial to them; and if your wish, by this method, to perpetuate

petuate the respectful remembrance of our uncommon Friend, be accomplished, I am satisfied, and shall think myself sufficiently rewarded,

That both you and they may be long spared, to imitate his virtues; and at last be permitted to dwell with him in the regions of immortal friendship, is the sincere wish and fervent prayer, of

W. SMITH,

Camberwell, March 21, 1793.

to the successful and
of our unbroken friendship
which, I am sure, will
think of it with only a word.

that both you and they may be
to be sure, I state the virtues
and as last he is entitled to dwell
with him in the regions of nature
the friendship is the sincere wish
and fervent prayer of



W. SWIFT

London, 18th Dec. 1853.

SILENT SUBMISSION

TO

THE WILL OF GOD.

PSALM xxxix. 9.

I WAS DUMB, I OPENED NOT MY MOUTH ; BE-
CAUSE THOU DIDST IT.

THESE remarkable words were originally spoken by the afflicted Psalmist. The mournful event, which gave rise to the solemn meditation of which they are a part, is not particularly told us. Commentators are apt to suppose, from the repeated introduction of the mortality of man, that David had lately met with a severe trial, in the loss of some near and dear relation. Be that as it may, the King of Israel here sets forth his own silent and submissive resignation

tion to the will of God, as a useful pattern for us to copy after, under the most dark and afflictive dispensations of Providence. ‘ *I was dumb, says he, I opened not my mouth ; because Thou didst it.*’ Briefly, as if he had said, Sure I am, that the God in whom I believe is the ruler of all things—I am convinced that no calamity or affliction can befall me without his permission or decree—I persuade myself, therefore, that however unexpected, or awfully trying, my late dispensation hath been, it is nevertheless just and right, and may finally tend to my comfort and happiness. On this account I am silent—I will not open my lips in a way of murmuring or repining—I have nothing to object ; no presumptuous question to ask ; it is the Lord Almighty who hath done it, and all is, and must be well. O, my friends, what a blessed temper of mind is this ! How happy ! could I be a mean of forwarding

forwarding such a disposition in myself and you. Good reason would you then have for ever to record the occasion of my preaching from these words ; and they would indeed prove as a "favour of life unto life" to our souls. To this end I shall, in farther discoursing from them, in the

First place, say a few things with respect to the great Dispenser or Controller of all Afflictions.

Secondly, Illustrate the professed disposition of David, and what ought to be ours under similar troubles, and then,

Thirdly and lastly, shew at some length, how the consideration mentioned in the first head, should lead to the temper of mind recommended under the second ; or, in other words, how God's being the

Author of troubles, ought to make us silent, submissive, and resigned under them.

I return to the first thing proposed, namely, to speak a word or two with regard to the Sovereign Dispenser of all Afflictions. *Thou didst it.*

Who was this, but David's God ? Even that Almighty Being, in whom he alone lived and moved ; yea, the God of his fathers, who had graciously made both with them and him an everlasting covenant. Nothing, indeed, in this world happens by chance, or through a blind, undiscerning fatality. Reason and Scripture assure us, that he who made the world, governs it, and regulateth every the minutest event which cometh to pass. Not only is God the Author of “ fruitful seasons, and “ doth constantly fill our hearts with “ food

" food and gladness," but, by way of punishment of sin, and also for his own wise ends,
 " he maketh poor, and he maketh rich, he
 " woundeth, and he healeth; he bringeth
 " down to the grave, and he bringeth up."
 So just the observation of the prophet Daniel, " That the Most High ruleth in the
 " kingdom among men." So truly doth another servant of the Lord declare, " From
 " him cometh down every good and perfect
 " gift;" neither is " there evil in the city,
 " and the Lord hath not done it." And, in
 one word, so nobly, as well as pathetically,
 did the patient suffering Job break forth to
 his uncharitable, deriding friends, " I have
 " understanding as well as you, and who
 " knoweth not that in all these the hand
 " of the Lord hath done this."

Having briefly spoken of the Author of troubles, I proceed,

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Secondly,

Secondly, To illustrate the professed disposition of David, and what ought to be ours under similar trials. *I was dumb* says he, *I opened not my mouth.* The words are plain and simple, but striking and expressive. The latter phrase riseth, as it were, above the former, in a kind of beautiful climax. Not only, as if the Psalmist had said, was I not actually found speaking against God, for taking away my comforts ; but I did not even allow myself to open my lips for this purpose. I set a strict, constant, and holy watch over them, and upon the impulsive mover, mine heart ; lest, in the course of my affliction, a single word of unwarrantable repining, or ungodly distrustful rebellion, should escape. [Such was David's humble and submissive behaviour, under the bereaving dispensation to which he here alludes ; and by reason of the Hebrew word for *opened* being in the future tense,

tenſe, we are warranted to affirm, that ſuch, he reſolved, ſhould be his behaviour, under every loſs or croſs he might meet with hereafter. I hope none, however, will imagine, from what I have now ſaid, that I would diſcountenance all manner of ſorrow, and encourage, in the ſmalleſt degree, a ſtoical apathy, or inſenſibility of heart. Human nature, my friends, muſt and will be human nature, as long as we are detained in this imperfect world. The warm heart will feel—the affectionate boſom will ſigh—and the fond moiſtened eyes diſtil their tributary tears.

But I argue not merely from the weakneſs and infirmity of our preſent conſtitutions. The ſucceſſive, the uncondemned practice of great and good men, in all ages, apologize for, and in a manner authorize the

custom of grieving properly under bereaving dispensations. Abraham, you know, mourned deeply for his beloved Sarah. Joseph, when his father died, fell upon his face, and kissed him. King David, and all the people, we are told, rent their cloaths, and lamented for the untimely death of worthy, innocent Abner. And the two beloved and loving sisters of the young, the hopeful, the promising Lazarus, were wont to go to his grave, and there weep and bewail their loss. But why should I confine your thoughts to the practice and example of mere fallible creatures? *Jesus wept*, John ii. 35. Even he who hath set us an example in all things, that we should follow his steps, amazing to relate! “ when he saw Mary weeping, and the Jews
 “ also weeping that came with her, he
 “ himself groaned in the spirit, and was
 “ troubled.”

“troubled.” From all this we may infer, most justly, That it is not weeping, or mourning simply, for the loss of friends, that we dare condemn as unwarrantable and unlawful, but only the manner, the measure, and the duration thereof.

To dwell upon each of these for a moment, will be the means of ascertaining what ought to be our particular temper and carriage under similar trials. In the first place, As to the *manner* of our weeping, let us be peculiarly careful that it be consistent with humility and duty. We err most certainly when in the midst, or even height, of our distress, we feel a rising in our hearts against God, and encourage or persist in the thought that it might have been better for us, and the world in general, had such a dispensation not taken place. What is this, but rashly and arrogantly to suppose, either that
the

the Judge of all the earth is cruel ; or that we, short-sighted mortals, are wiser in our generation than God ?

But again, as to the *measure*; or degree, of our grief. It is plain, we are not of the Psalmist's temper, if we refuse to listen to the voice of comfort. Good old Jacob was undoubtedly wrong, when he turned away from his sympathizing friends, and said, " I *will* go down into the grave unto " my son mourning." Excessive grief impairs the constitution, and sometimes destroyeth it altogether. To give way to it, therefore, is evidently a breach of the sixth commandment, and a taking upon us to dispose of that life which God hath given us for other purposes. Nay, let me add, farther, by allowing our grief to run beyond bounds, we, as it were, forego all the Christian privileges and prospects ; and
sadly

sadly forget that the Apostle Paul hath told us, in the 4th chapter of his epistle to the Thessalonians, not, and never to sorrow as those who have no hope

Lastly, as to the *duration* of our grief, under bereaving dispensations of Providence. Notwithstanding we are allowed to weep, yea, in some cases to weep more than others, yet, after all, the days of our mourning must be limited. The particular texture of our animal frame happily helpeth us here. Were the impressions of sorrow, made upon our hearts at times, to remain always, as strong as at the beginning, we should be unfitted for discharging the duties of life. Hence that good custom amongst the ancient Jews, and primitive Christians, of setting apart a portion of time to mourn for their relations; and when this was expired, to strive to think
of

of them no more : I mean, no longer to think of them, so as to hinder their cheerful attendance upon God's service, or due respect and obligation toward their fellow-creatures.

From all this you will see, my brethren, that we have not only to take care that our sorrow be of a right sort, but likewise that it be neither excessive in degree, nor continued beyond a reasonable limited time. And thus have I, under this head, both explained to you the temper of the Psalmist, when he said, *I was dumb, I opened not my mouth* ; and also, by way of digression, pointed out how far we may be allowed to come short of his absolute resignation, when bewailing the loss of near and dear relations.

I come

I come now, as was proposed under the third and last general head, to shew, at some length, how the consideration mentioned in the first head of my discourse, should lead to the temper and disposition recommended under the second; or, in other words, how God's being the Author of troubles, ought to make us silent, submissive, and resigned under them.

The first argument that I shall here produce, ariseth from the property which God hath in us. We are not our own masters. Soul and body we belong to another, and that other is God. Without our aid did he at first create both us and our comforts. Little, or nothing, do we contribute, essentially, either to our own or their daily preservation. When, therefore, God is pleased to resume what he only lent us for a time, it would be the
highest

highest injustice to murmur or complain,
Again,

Secondly, Another consideration to lead us to the temper of the Psalmist, is the perfections of God. Not only is the Almighty Jehovah the Author, Preserver, and Disposer of all things, but he is, in his own intrinsic nature, perfectly wise, and just, and good. Whatsoever comes to pass, therefore, being in consequence of his permission and decree, shall and must, upon the whole, be right. To will and wish, then, that this or the other event in Providence had not fallen out as it did, and to grudge and repine too much thereat—what is it, my friends? what is it, but to suppose the Governor of the world capable of acting partially? what is it, in effect, but crying out with the stiff-necked Israelites of old, “The way of the Lord is not equal?” Far from

from our minds be the blasphemous idea. Our ways indeed are unequal, but God's ways and works are always equal. To repiners of this sort, the Lord himself speaks, Psalm xlv. 10. *Be still, and know that I am God.* But,

Thirdly, The consideration of God's being the Author of Afflictions, ought to beget in us silence and submission, seeing that, as Christians, we have given ourselves up to him ; and he hath bought us with the precious blood of his dear Son. It is the constant profession of every Believer, and I would fain hope it is our daily and sincere resolution, through grace, to take up our cross and follow Christ. What was his disposition here ? " Not my will, " but thine, O Heavenly Father, be done ! " It is expressly prophesied of God's children, " That they shall be made a willing " people

“ people in the day of his power ;” i. e. they shall not only be made willing to renounce all other Saviours, and to accept him for their Prophet to instruct, and their High Priest to atone ; but be made willing to receive him as their King and Governor, to rule them and all their concerns. “ Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do ?” is, or ought to be, the cry of every converted soul ; and, “ Behold ! here I am, let him do to me what seemeth good unto him,” is, or ought to be, the submissive language of every Saint. Resignation, saith a Preacher of the last age, is as essential a part of the new nature, as rebellion is of the old ; and therefore it is, and must be, the duty of every Believer in Jesus. But the argument here will acquire additional strength, by attending to the latter part of this consideration, viz, “ That we are bought with a price, even
 “ with

“with the precious blood of the son of God;”
 and therefore, says the Apostle, 1. Cor. vi.
 20. “We ought to glorify him in our bo-
 dies and in our spirits, which are God’s.”
 But how shall we perform this better, how
 can we glorify God in our bodies and in our
 spirits more, than by giving up these, and
 all that concerns them, to be directed and
 disposed of according to his sovereign plea-
 sure?

Once more, upon this head. Give me
 leave to observe, that God’s being the sove-
 reign controller of all dispensations, ought
 to render us silent and submissive: seeing,
 that as long as we continue to trust in him,
 as our covenant God, we must, at the same
 time, believe, that all these, whatsoever
 they are, shall finally work together for our
 good. My friends, is this the truth? is it
 the truth of God that I am speaking? Are
 you Christians indeed? Have you given up
 all other Saviours? Do you acquiesce in Je-

fus alone for light, and life, and salvation ?
 The promise, the glorious privilege, be-
 longs to you. What hinders you from ap-
 plying it ? Applying it, how can you fret
 and repine ? repine because God withholds
 this or that desired good ; or hath seen
 meet to deprive you of this or the other
 dear earthly comfort ? Consider the pro-
 mise, my brethren, and consider your pre-
 sent conduct. Doth every event work
 together for your good ? Do you anxiously
 wish that some of these dispensations had
 never taken place ? The least that can be
 said is, That you are replying against your
 God and Saviour ; and that you are doing
 all you can to prevent him from training
 you up in his own way, for trusting and
 obeying him here, and for glorifying and
 enjoying him hereafter.—But to apply the
 doctrine to particular events.

Hath it pleased God, O Believer, to take
 from you the riches or outward prosperity
 you

you once enjoyed? 'Tis more than probable they were a snare, and might have been a curse to you. Hath he by death deprived you of a favourite son, or daughter, in whose filial affection you anticipated the sweetest happiness? Perhaps they are only taken away from the evil to come. In a word, hath the Lord, in the course of his mysterious Providence, thought proper to bereave you of a friend, a relation, your nearest and dearest partner in life? It is possible, my brethren—if you reflect with attention, you may find that *these* were stealing your affections too much from God, who alone is worthy of them, and who ought to be the chief object of your faith, your hope, and your love. Thus reasoning, upon every occasion, you will improve thereby. You will see the merciful hand of God; in all your troubles, working for your good; and from this promise, as well as from the other considerations already mentioned, be enabled with

David to say—"I was dumb, I opened
 "not my mouth, because thou didst it."

Thus have I, in some measure, accomplished what I proposed, in discoursing from this text in general. Permit me now to call forth your attention to the more immediate and particular occasion of my preaching from these words.

It is the death of Mr. William Aiton, a member of this church, and his Majesty's principal gardener at Kew. Were I disposed to speak much and long in praise of the dead; no character, perhaps, would afford me larger scope, than that of our departed friend. With every desirable qualification of body, he possessed the most gentle and amiable disposition of soul.

The Gentleman and the Christian, so happily blended in a sweet constitution, engaged the good will of all—endeared him
 more

more especially to his acquaintances and friends—and to his relations and family has rendered his loss in this world irreparable.

1 Mr. Aiton was a native of Hamilton, in Scotland. He was born in the year 1731, and came to this country in the summer of 1754. With astonishment, I have heard him relate his early industry, and unabating application to business.

By these means, and the blessing of heaven accompanying them, his abilities and usefulness were soon perceived, acknowledged, and rewarded. In the year 1759, he was pointed out to the Princess Dowager of Wales, and his present Majesty, as a man the best qualified, and most proper to arrange and form a botanical garden at Kew. Under their successive protection and encouragement, he studied and laboured for these last thirty-four years; collecting from every corner of this country, and procuring from the remotest climes the

most rare and valuable productions of the vegetable creation. How far he has succeeded in this arduous, this useful, and laudable pursuit, the present state of that place, the accurate and elegant description, lately published of it by himself, with the unanimous approbation and praise of all proficients in the science of botany, are, and I trust shall continue for ages to be, the most undeniable and ample testimonies.

Mr. Aiton's character as a man, considering our present fallen state, was honourable for human nature. Without controversy, it could be said of him, what it were to be wished could be said of more, That his rising in the world went hand in hand with the good will and comfortable subsistence of all around him. To the meanest labourer under him, he behaved with affability and gentleness.

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To him the poor man, who could, and would work, seldom or never sued for bread in vain. Multitudes in the same line of business, by his patronage and recommendation, are now comfortably settled in the world, with their families—In a word, as he had for a considerable part of his life been placed in the highest sphere of his profession, so he attracted the notice, and acquired the approbation of many, from the lowest to the very highest rank : for I am permitted to say, That he has often enjoyed very particular marks of the bounty and favour of our most amiable Sovereign. Allow me to add farther, that not only was our friend universally known and esteemed in his own country ; but his name and fame have extended to distant kingdoms, and to every quarter of the globe. I myself have found them passports in various places abroad ; and through his recommendation alone been introduced to men of genius and science even in foreign courts.

But, from his general character as a man, let me proceed to his principles and conduct as a Christian.

These alone are of any avail to him now. The approbation and the applause of men vanish as soon as the curtain of time drops : and to have studied and known the whole arcana of nature will not suffice—It is ignorance in the sight of Heaven—unless accompanied by the saving knowledge of *Jesus Christ and him crucified*.

Mr. Aiton was a constant and firm believer in Christianity. From his earliest infancy he had been trained up by pious and conscientious parents, in the doctrines, and form of worship, maintained by the established Church in Scotland. Of course, when he came into this part of the united kingdoms, and found that our forefathers, at the union, regardless of any thing but civil advantages, had taken no care respecting
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the spiritual privileges of their children here, he was under a necessity of joining himself to a congregation of Protestant Dissenters.

With them he found a purity and simplicity of worship similar to his own. At the same time, I must observe, that he was most liberal in his sentiments and conduct, with regard to the established Church of this country. At times I have heard him thus express himself, “ We have each but
 “ one faith and one hope—we differ only in
 “ little unessential modes and ceremonies—
 “ good men undoubtedly there are in both
 “ sects, and ere long we must worship together
 “ in the same place—Is it not to be desired
 “ then that we should sometimes assemble
 “ together here below?”—You will not wonder that such a man, when he could not conveniently get to a dissenting Meeting-house, should most cordially join in the prayers and service of the Church of England,

land. But in his declining months and dying days, I persuade myself, that these lesser distinctions were laid aside and forgotten altogether.—Into the hands of the general Head of the Church he committed his living and departing spirit. With no communion upon earth, nor unto the mediation of any creature that ever existed, dared he to trust so precious a deposit. As an illustration of this, permit me to relate what happened, but a day or two, before his death. When sinking under the weight of the disease, and his very soul was, in a manner, dissolving at the thought of parting with his wife and children—a tried friend, most opportunely, reminded him that his God in covenant was all-sufficient; “There! there!” exclaimed he—“my dear friend! *In this God is all my trust.*” And where could he better place it The oracles of truth, which cannot lie, hath said, in divers places, “Blessed is the man that maketh
“ the

“ the Lord his trust ” — “ Blessed are all
 “ they that wait for him.”

This blessedness, I trust, is the everlasting portion of our dear friend, and therefore, I would now recommend his dying example unto all. Were his highest Patrons here, I would say, *Trust in God* in every emergency ; and you and all your's shall be safe. Were his philosophical and nature-exploring friends present, I could do nothing better than to remind them, that the true secret of human happiness, is to rise from the contemplation of God's works to the knowledge and friendship of God himself.—Unto all, in general, who have had the happiness of our departed brother's acquaintance, or friendship, let me here add—Examine yourselves—consider whether his God and Saviour be yours—and recollecting, from time to time, his moral and religious qualities, endeavour, through grace,
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to follow him so far, as he was a follower of Jesus Christ.—Must I subjoin a word to the surviving relatives?—But what can I say? I would impress your mind upon the occasion; but I would not agitate or depress the spirit too much.—You have lost a most loving and affectionate husband, and the very best of fathers. Lost, did I say? I retract the word—as I dislike the expressions you see every day in the periodical papers, of such a one having *put an end to his existence*, or of such a friend being now *no more*.

Your husband and your father is not lost. He has only exchanged this life for another, and a better. He is gone a little before to render your departure from a present world less reluctant, and your admission into another more joyful.

It

It was the will and determination of God, (as you have heard to day) that he should be taken away at this period, rather than at any other.—Keep alive this consideration upon your minds, and it will not only produce a silent submission, but persuade you ultimately that it was the fittest and best. How many other motives doth our religion afford to reconcile you to this dispensation of Providence? Think of the precious legacy that is left you in the word and promise of God, as recorded by his servant Jeremiah, chap. xlix. 11. *Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me.*

Yes, my young friends—your earthly parent is indeed gone, but your Heavenly Father lives for ever. He will now, more especially, take you under his divine protection; and nothing but an unbelieving heart, nothing but an irreligious life shall
be

be able to separate you from his paternal love.—Acknowledge then the God of your father, and he shall ever direct you—trust in him as *your* God and Father also; and you shall never be disappointed. Again,

How affectionately and compassionately doth the Almighty ever speak, with respect to the state of a widow! He styles himself in Scripture—*her Helper—her Father—and her Judge, in his holy habitation*: and particularly to such as are under adversity and fly to him, he hath given this comforting assurance, *That he will never leave them nor forsake them.*—Sweet promises to the surviving partner of our worthy friend. In the knowledge and belief of them, I persuade myself *she will not sorrow as those who have no hope.* On the contrary, that she will treasure them up in her memory, and bring them forth to her use and comfort in every time of need. Above all, remembering

remembering daily, that as *Jesus* himself *died and rose again from the dead*, so all that sleep in him will God take care of in their graves ; and raise again to life and glory everlasting. In such an expectation, she will look back without repining, and forward with the utmost satisfaction and joy. Yes, my friends, for this is the grand and exclusive privilege of religious connections. The death of the wicked is heart-sinking and gloomy ; but in the separation of the righteous, there darts forth a ray of the sweetest hope. For what can be more sweet than to part in the assured expectation of soon meeting again—meeting in yonder happy world, where relatives and friends shall meet in glory to part no more ? Let us, therefore, from this time, more and more indulge the soul-elevating prospect. It will have a powerful tendency to loosen our immoderate attachment to sublunary things. In the most dark, and
dull,

dull, and heavy hours, it will enlighten, enliven, and chear our hearts. Under every distress it will comfort, and through every difficulty it will carry us, until the dawn of that last morn, and God's everlasting day, appear; when, methinks, I behold many a parent and child, many a sister and brother, many a husband and wife, many a pastor and his flock, unite together again, and go forward, in a glorious assembly to the beatific presence; where free from pain, languor, and sorrow, full of ease, life and joy, they shall sing the praises of Father, Son and Holy Ghost through the endless ages of eternity.

May this be the happy portion of us all: and to God, our God in Christ Jesus, be all the glory and the praise, for ever and ever. Amen.

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